



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 5, 2013

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### **A Statement on the Legacy of Nelson Mandela By Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas**

I am profoundly saddened to learn of the passing of former South African President Nelson Mandela. I wish to convey heartfelt condolences to his family and to the people of South Africa for their loss. To those of us who cherish freedom, justice and peace, President Mandela was more than a symbol – he was our father too, the father of the modern human rights struggle and the preeminent proponent of liberation in the latter half of the 20th Century.

He was a democrat who understood that genuine leadership balances the commitment to principle with a willingness to compromise, revolution with reconciliation and personal power with the empowerment of his followers. In 1990, Mandela came to our city at the invitation of then-Mayor Tom Bradley as a gesture of gratitude for the leading role our region played in imposing economic sanctions against the apartheid regime that had imprisoned him for 27 years.

He appeared at the L.A. Coliseum that June, just four months after his release from prison in South Africa and Los Angeles loved him. As he did for millions of people around the world, he moved us with his grace, his forgiveness and his strength. Tens of thousands turned out to hear and see the legendary freedom fighter and he told us that he could not have left the United States “without visiting the city which daily nourished the dreams of millions of people the world over.” He went on to call our city the “unchallenged capital of motion pictures,” and a “city of glamour and splendor.”

But he also understood our true spirit. “We who have suffered and continue to suffer the pain of oppression know that underneath that face of Los Angeles lies the great and noble spirit of the citizenry,” he said. “We who fight for human rights know the depths of the human spirit running through the hills and valleys of the state of California.” His address before those assembled at the Coliseum will be memorialized with a plaque

bearing his image later this year. Three years after visiting Los Angeles, Mandela was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The next year, he was elected President of the Republic of South Africa. He was, as Newsweek stated, "Washington and Lincoln rolled into one." For all the lessons that he taught us we are grateful, and we must never forget. He refused to allow bitterness, divisiveness or hatred twist his heart. To his enemies he held out an olive branch and understood that real revolution ensures freedom for all people, but that ultimately, reconciliation is what makes democracy flourish. Nelson Mandela came to our city in a gesture of gratitude for our role in the anti-apartheid and divestiture movements, which helped to advance the cause of democracy in South Africa. It was a cause for the ages and Nelson Mandela indeed was and is a man for the ages.

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